

The Church Had Peace and Was Edified

Acts 9:20-31

Remember last week we were introduced to Saul, studying his conversion by the supernatural, sovereign intervention of God. Saul the unbeliever became Saul the converted. And God's chosen vessel, as he explained to Ananias,

v.15 "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."

We read that Saul was then baptized upon his conversion.

v.18 "Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized."

And after reading in verse 29 that he "spent some days with the disciples at Damascus," today we read that...

v.20 "Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God."

Immediately he set about the work to which God had called him and set him apart, and that is where we begin today. Immediately, we are introduced to,

I. SAUL THE PREACHER.

Immediately he preached Christ. Interesting that the older Greek manuscript upon which the ESV and other translations was based identify Jesus by name, not "Christ." "Immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues." Even those different texts demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, as we will see in a minute in verse 22, and most likely the word used in the original manuscript would have been Jesus, but the early scholars and preachers would have connected them so completely they could interchanged without error. So Saul preached Jesus. He

preached Christ. And later, writing to the Corinthians, he declared this,

1 Cor. 2:1 "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

1 Cor. 1:22 "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Back in Acts 9, Luke makes sure to emphasize in verse 20 the content of that preaching, namely the identity of Jesus Christ.

A. Christ is the son of God.

So to preach Christ, to preach Jesus, is to proclaim and declare that he is the son of God. And that means, the eternal son of God. It means the second person of the trinity, the second person of the godhead. It means that Jesus is God, equal with God in the very essential nature of his deity. He is the son of God means he is God. So we read,

John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."

And so that there is no uncertainty or confusion, John would proclaim in,

v.14 "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

So the word of God is God. And the word of God is Jesus. Jesus is fully God, eternally God. And that is not a secondary doctrine of our faith, but right at the heart and center of all the we believe. Jesus is God! And that is a matter of life and death, spiritual life and spiritual death. It is a matter of salvation or condemnation.

1 John 5:20 “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

Believing this is of absolute necessity for eternal life.

1 John 5:10 “He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. 11 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”

Thus, to proclaim that Jesus Christ is the son of God is to proclaim that Jesus Christ is God. There is no middle ground.

John 3:36 “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

We see another important emphasis in Luke’s description of Saul’s preaching. Note,

v.22 “But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.”

Jesus is the Christ. And Christ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah. The anointed one. And every faithful Jew, every Jew who knew the Bible, would understand the significance of that. The central hope of the Old Testament was the promised Messiah, the king whom God anointed to rule and reign over Israel. Every believing Jew would look forward to that great promise. That was the focus of the entire Jewish religion, it was the focus of God’s covenant promise all the way back to Abraham. Messiah the Prince as we read in Daniel’s prophecy. The anointed messiah is at the heart of Psalm 2.

Ps. 2:1 “Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3 “Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.” 4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 “Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion.”

And we know who that anointed one is! It is the son of God.

Ps. 2:7 “I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

So Saul is preaching that...

B. Jesus is the promised Jewish messiah.

Jesus is the Christ.

v.22 “But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.”

Interesting the word is “confounded.” Saul is challenging the rebellious and unbelieving Jews to recognize what the whole their religion is all about. He is challenging them to recognize that Jesus is their Messiah, their anointed ruler and king promised by God. And they were resisting. So Saul confronts them. And confounds them. And we read later of Apollos doing the same thing. We read of him in,

Acts 18:24 “Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord.”

That chapter continues with Apollos’ arrival in Achaia,

Acs 18:27 “...and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; 28 for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.”

This is the central message that must be proclaimed to all nations, beginning with the Jews. Judaism, without Christ, is now a false religion. It is empty, worthless. Because the whole purpose of God in Old Testament Judaism is to point to the coming Messiah. And his name is Jesus! That’s the focus of the preaching of the apostles in the book of Acts. And that is the focus of faithful preaching to this day. “Jesus is the Christ.”

Obviously, many refused to believe. Thus Saul the preaching became,

II. SAUL THE ENEMY.

A. Unbelieving Jews sought to kill Jesus.

The church had to rescue him from that danger.

v.23 “Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. 24 But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. 25 Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.”

We read further,

v. 29 “And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.”

That certainly won’t be the last time that Saul’s life is threatened. Such attempts will recur as we continue to study through this book of Acts. But note here, it is not only the Jews who were opposed to Paul. The new Christians were as well.

B. Believers feared and doubted Jesus.

v.26 “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.”

Humanly speaking, that’s very understandable. They knew his reputation. They knew of his previous intention to persecute and to kill them! And even Ananias doubted, whom God had chosen to introduce Saul to the believers and disciples of Jesus. Remember,

v.13 Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”

It was in response to that question that the Lord clearly identified Saul, as we saw last week.

v.15 “But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

In our text today, it is Barnabas whom the Lord uses for Saul's defense, with much good effect.

v.27 "But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. 29 And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.

God changes people, doesn't he? The lives of those who are opposed to Christ can be changed, their course of action reversed. And that is a good lesson in grace and humility, not to judge people for who they were or what they use to do. Rather, we should be eager to observe and affirm the saving power of God to take a man, as wicked and evil as Saul, and convert him not only unto eternal salvation, but to call him to proclaim boldly the truth of the gospel. Thankfully, the church responded well to Barnabas,

v.30 "When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus."

And then we read,

v.31 "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied."

Luke often includes summary statements such as these when records the events of history in this great book of Acts. The introduction to his gospel account describes that careful attention to the historical record.

Luke 1:1 "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among

us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed."

The book of Acts, of course, continues that narrative, that "orderly account." And so we read those words of commentary evaluating the health and well-being of that early church. There is much to be said about that description of the church, for it is such a good and encouraging description of a healthy church, in any age. So it is a good checklist even to evaluate our own strength and well-being. Let's look more closely at that description of...

III. THE WELL-BEING OF THE CHURCH.

First, we see,

A. The church at peace.

v.31 "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace."

They were "of one accord," a phrase which we have noted previously in the book of Acts.

Acts 1:14 "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers."

Acts 2:1 "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."

Acts 2:46 "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having

favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

Acts 4:24 “So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them.”

The point is that being “of one accord” is a very important priority. The problem of division was what Paul had to address at Corinth,

1 Cor. 1:10 “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

Thus the very first application of the gospel which Paul identifies in Ephesians is this,

Eph. 4:1 “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all

Notice what is necessary to preserve that unity. Lowliness and gentleness. With longsuffering. And bearing with one

another in love. Or as Paul puts it in,

Phil. 2:2 “...fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

The church ought to be the church at peace. We ought to be of one accord, and to accomplish that, “let each esteem others better than himself.”

Then in verse 31 Luke describes what he observes as,

B. The church edified.

Edified means to be built up. Like a building. Strengthened. Made strong and stable, secure. Perhaps the best description of that is found in Ephesians 4, where Paul describes God’s provision of leadership for his church and the purpose of that leadership.

Eph.4:11 “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

That's what it means for the church to be edified. Let me repeat that language from Ephesians 4—that we all come “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Further, “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plottin.” Instead, that we may “may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.” And here is real maturity, the greatest evidence of a church edified, that the church is like a human body, in “which every part does its share.” That's the church edified. Every part does it's share. The ESV puts that verse, “when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

So please think in those terms as you think of yourself and your place within this church. The goal is that “every part does its share.” That's how Luke describes the churches throughout the whole region, in “all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.” They “had peace and were edified.” Then, further, Luke describes,

C. The church walking in the fear of God.

What a marvelous way to describe God's people! They were walking in the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord means that you honor the Lord, that you respect the Lord in every way, that you acknowledge his glory as the ultimate goal and purpose of all things, that you live with the reverence and devotion that is due to God alone.

Heb. 12:28 “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire.”

So again, consider these words with respect to your own life, and to the life of our church. That you yourself, and we together, might be able to describe ourselves this way, “walking in the fear

of God.” Then, fourthly, from verse 31, we see,

D. The church walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is called the comforter, isn't he? Also, the helper.

John 14:15 “If you love Me, keep My commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”

John 15:26 “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. 27 And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”

It is the Holy Spirit who is our helper, our comforter. It is he who dwells in us, he who teaches us, he who instructs us. He who strengthens us. And perhaps we don't talk about that enough. Perhaps I don't preach on this enough. But here it is in Luke's description of the well-being of the church, they walked in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. And, as a result, as the demonstration of God's blessing, we see,

E. The church multiplying.

The church growing.

v.31 “...they were multiplied.”

We see the same observation in,

Acts 16:5 “So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.”

It's not just numbers for the sake of numbers. Size is not simply an external measure of the well-being of the church.

Rather, size is the result of all these things Luke has mentioned in verse 31. Size is the result of what I just read, “the churches were strengthened in the faith.” Size represents the work of God unto salvation in the conversion of unbelievers, it is the evidence of the power of God to bring life to the dead and salvation to the lost.

In general terms, pray for that well-being for all God’s churches, in every place. Pray for such well-being in the churches of our own country. And pray for it among us. Make this your goal and ambition, your vision for the well-bring of our own church.

v.31 “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.”